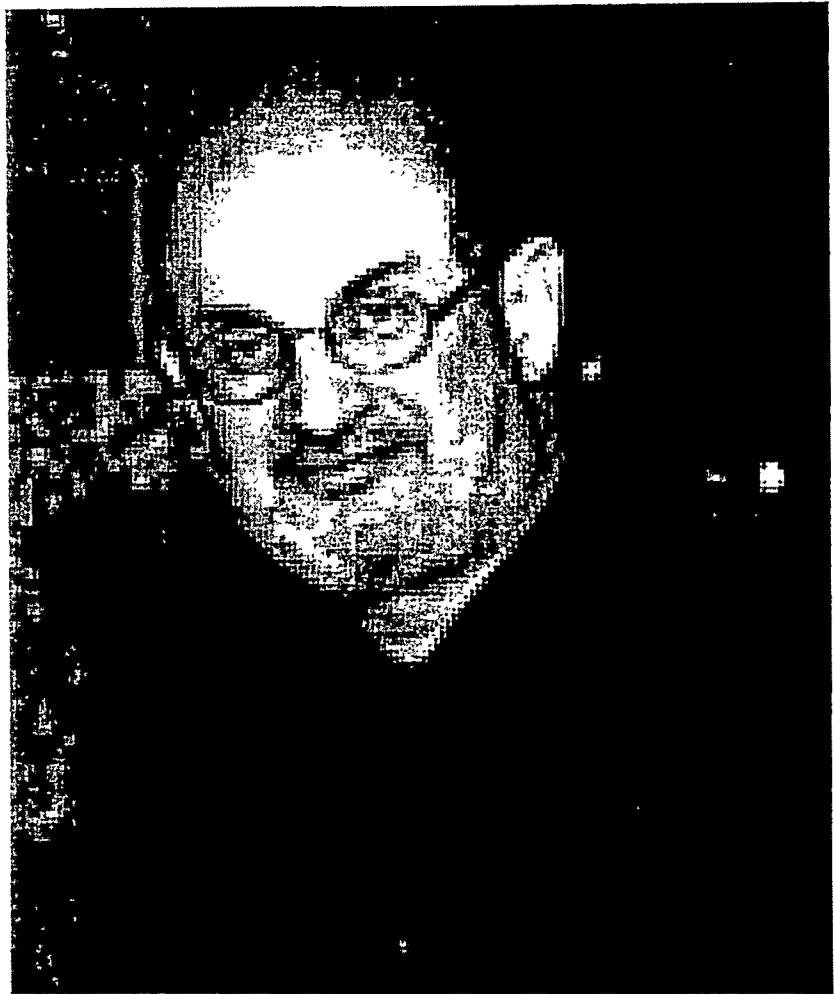


CHAPTER TWO

THE PORTRAYAL OF EMERGENCY

IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN



*'The ice is always waiting ...
just under the water's skin.'*

- Rushdie

2.1 Introduction :

Historical and political events have always lured the writers towards it. Their glimpses give the writer an opportunity to meditate and collect their broken, shattered and scattered dreams. They provide them with an outlet for their anger and weirdness through their writing. They share their feelings of appreciation or repulsion with their readers. Through their insightful analysis of the past mistakes, they promote a new progressive visionary trend of thinking.

The Third World writers like Achebe, Marquez and others have said in their interviews to *South* (Jan. 1983:21) that they do not write for their erstwhile, coloniser but are writing first for people of their own nations in languages and accents their compatriots can understand. They consider literature “as an important medium for helping to shape national consciousness, for contributing to the historic projects or development” and they examine through literature, the fundamental questions of national history, national identity, national purpose and national morality and outlook. Many of the Indian writers like Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Singh, Nayantara

Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry and others have revealed and asserted the importance of the historical and political facts in the fictional world.

2.1.2 Salman Rushdie : The Novelist and His works :

Timothy Brennan in his book titled *Salman Rushdie and The Third World: Myth of Nation* (1989 :12-13) examines Rushdie as the third world novelist. He has praised Rushdie for making English literature up-to-date and giving the English novel a stylistic equivalent in English to 'Magical realism'. Rushdie occupies a special place in English literary scene.

Salman Rushdie (1947) is one of the most recognised novelists of the world. Being a scintillating writer of prose and an artist of the great imagination, he has made a tremendous and lasting impact on the contemporary writers, both the new and the established, as his novels mark a radical departure from what has been written in English literature to this date. As a novelist, he prefers writing mostly on political issues. He is mainly involved in the most crucial events of the day in India.

Salman Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* (1975) remained unnoticed till the publication of his *Midnight's Children* (1980) [Won Booker prize of 1981]. His third novel, *Shame* is a satire on the political situations of Pakistan. His other novels are *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1989), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar, The Clown* (2005). His other books *Temple Bar Music Centre* (1999) and *The vintage Book of Indian Writing* (1947-1997) have also earned world-wide acclaims for him.

All Rushdie's novels deal with history, politics, love, sex, corruption, religion, struggle for freedom, partition, emergency, communal problem and such other social, political issues which Rushdie treats in his own distinctive style.

2.1.2 *Midnight's Children* :

Midnight's Children (1980) is a political novel which presents the most realistic pictures of many events of Indian political Scenario. He presents the political happenings in such a lively manner that it appears as if the political history of Indian Subcontinent has been

redrawn. In this novel Rushdie has related private life to public events and explored the limits of individuality in a country as big as populous and as culturally variegated as India.

Rushdie identifies himself with the protagonist Saleem, by putting his autobiographical details in his character. And with the help of Saleem's collective experiences he presents all the major events of Twentieth century. The novel contains vivid picturisation of various political events in India such as the freedom struggle, the partition, the Bangladesh war and also the Post-Independent Political scene in India. The interaction of history and the central character is greatly influenced by the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and Indian Emergency in 1975. There is a truthful picturisation of Indian division and dissents, chaos and disillusion, communal tensions, religious fanaticism besides traditional values and modernising efforts.

Midnight's Children covers the experiences of three generations of a sinai family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar and Agra and then in Bombay and finally migrating to Karachi. Saleem Sinai is Central character of the novel and highlights the connection between

public affairs and private lives of Indian society. He reminds the readers of being ‘mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destiny being ‘indissoluble chained’ to those of his country. His birth at the benighted movement thrust upon him at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. Saleem take himself responsible for installing national events and many consequences. Sometimes he become melancholic during few occasions when he had an insight into his own pathetic situation. In Rushdie’s view, Independence and Emergency have created the great upheavals and paradoxes in the history of India.

2.2 Potrayal of Emergency in

Midnight’s Children :

“I heard (with one good and one bad ear)
the inexorable sound of the future stealing
up, upon us tick:tock, louder and louder,
until the birth of Saleem Sinai and also of
the baby’s father found a mirror in the
event of the night of the 25th June.” (496)

Our Country, in the year 1975, was filled with the silence of sounds and furies of the people. In the wake of Allahabad High Court verdict it was quite expected from the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi' to resign, which would have been an ethical act and would have improved her image as a law-abiding Prime Minister and also raised her as a true promoter of democracy.

But the winds were blowing in wrong direction' soon after the judgement the opposition parties and even the men within the Congress Party expected her to step down on moral basis' but, when they saw no sign of it, they started 'Satyagraha' under the guidance of Jayprakash Narayan. They arranged several campaigns to prevent legislators from attending to their legislative functions and to force them to resign. Some of the opposition leaders wanted people to force Mrs. Gandhi physically to resign. They went to the extent of urging armed forces not to obey the orders till they judged the orders to be right by themselves and checked their merits.

Such 'Satyagraha' on the otherhand infuriated Sanjay Gandhi, a pampered son and a man of high ambition who once said that they would not leave the 'Sinhasan' or throne easily and if his mother gave

it up, he would take it, much as if it were some ancestral property. Sanjay Gandhi had convinced his mother that she must cling to power at all cost. Mrs. Gandhi was well aware of the corrupt and corroding effect of political power. She was in delimita when Sanjay whispered to her,

“Amma, you are not resigning. You will be playing your enemies game. They would not get rid of you by hook or crook ! you are not to resign Amma, understood?”

(Abbas; 1989 : 19-20)

and she understood.

Salman Rushdie prophesies through Saleem’s illusions/visions the forthcoming dark days in which every soul will gasp for breath. He hints at the unbelievable era in which Mrs. Gandhi turned stubbron towards the feelings of Indians, just falling headlong to the advice given by Sanjay Gandhi and his coterie with glib tongue. Rushdie observes,

“History books newspapers, radio-programmes tell us that at two p.m. on June 12th Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was found guilty by Judge Jag Mohanlal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court of two counts of Campaign of 1971; what has never Previously been revealed is that it was at Precisely 2 P.M. that parvati-the-witch became sure she had enter labour’.

(497)

Saleem has individualised history. He is certain that directly or indirectly he is responsible for the things happening around. Emergency is personified by Aadam Sinai, Rushdie here dramatises the proclamation of Emergency with the birth of Aadam Sinai. 12th June 1975 was the day which actually led India towards Emergency. Though for one second Mrs. Gandhi wanted to step down, the next movement with the support of her son and other party members she decided to hold on to the office. And their totalitarian desire to remain

in power enforced them to sketch a plan against each opponent. This sketching of plans, their actions and discussions are symbolised as the labour pains through which whole of the nation has to go.

“The labour of parvati-laylah lasted for thirteen days... midwives were obliged to listen to her useless shrieks...”

(497)

Imagery of contracted cervix which refused to dilate signifies that though the imposition of Emergency was assured, it took sometime to get implemented. The triplets who were obliged to hear the shrieks can be identified with Sanjay Gandhi, R.K. Dhawan and Bansi Lal who were eager to hear from the Prime Minister about the enforcement of Emergency as well as waited for the exact reason for the proclamation from the opponents.

Rushdie with the shades of words, brush of pen and canvas has aptly painted the grey and tense atmosphere in the nation.

“On second day, when in Gujarat Mrs. Gandhi’s electoral candidates were routed By the Janata Morcha, my parvati was in the Grip of pain so intense that they made her as Stiff as steel ...”

(498)

Against her decision not to resign Mrs. Gandhi's opponents addressed people. They arranged processions and demonstrations against her. Congress members also supported the opponents' view, and a new front Janata Morcha came into existence under Jayprakash Narayan's leadership. It made Indira Gandhi more stiff against the whole nation. She came under the hypnotic spell of her younger son and his coterie. Rushdie writes,

“... ninthday the ghetto had fallen into a
terrible hush, a silence so absolute ...
Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president's house,
a horror struck muteness of the same awful
enveloping magic as the great silence...”

(498)

The tension was mounted and piled day by day. India was under a dark blanket of silence which covered the half-dead corpse of democracy. The demonstrations of Janata Morcha and Morarji Desai's appeal to the President, to sack the disgraced Prime Minister was just heard by the nation who turned deaf out of unexplained fear. This terrible silence can be compared with the silence in Germany where the concentration camps were filled with suffocated shrieks and yet

the nation was silent as if deaf. We read in *Midnight's Children*:

'It was the twelfth day and ...

elsewhere in the city the Supreme Court was informing Mrs. Gandhi that she need not resign until her appeal, but must neither vote in the Lok Sabha nor draw a salary, and while the Prime Minister in her exultation at his partial victory began to abuse her opponents in language of which Koli-fishwife would have been proud, my parvatis labour entered a phase in which despite her utter exhaustion she found energy ...'

(498)

On 24th June, the Supreme Court judgement allowed her to participate in parliamentary debates and the most important of all it allowed her to continue as Prime Minister. But this partial victory over her opponents aroused over confidence in her and she started abusing them for misdirecting and misaddressing the nation against her for their own benefits. Mrs. Gandhi's future as the Prime Minister was almost ruined. But Supreme Court offered her a ray of hope; though under strict conditions, she gained energy which however left the whole nation in utter exhaustion.

Parvati was exhausted moreover, she suffered in her labour pains. Yet she pushed the baby with renewed force. This symbolizes the efforts of Mrs. Gandhi to cleanse her image in the eyes of the nation.

The efforts to clean the stigma on her career by targeting the opponents show her undoubted frustration and realisation that she was no more ideal as her father.

“... triplets began to screech it's coming, coming, coming and elsewhere the Prime Minister was giving birth to a child of her own.”

(499)

The triplets, who took the role of midwives in the magicians ghetto were eagerly awaiting the coming of baby and were actually assisting for its birth. While elsewhere in Delhi at Safdarjanganh No.1, the Prime Minister had written an urgent letter to the President in respect of the proclamation of Emergency. Mr. Dhawan was off with the letter to the President and here the triplets Sanjay Gandhi, Bansilal and Baroorah were waiting eagerly for the news from Dhawan.

Salman Rushdie with his all uniqueness has painted the last few minutes before the proclamation which are compared and are the same as the final phase of the delivery where the pains are acute and atmosphere is vague.

“...The triplets screeched, while members of the Central Reserve police arrested the heads the heads of the Janata Morcha...”

(499)

President Frakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed the proclamation and the battle of uncertainty was won by Mrs. Gandhi. She was sure of JP's power to shake the whole nation out of slumber; so before the nation could wake up, it was necessary to send her in coma and it was only possible when the Gandhian leaders like JP and Morarji Desai who were close to her father were put behind the bars At the exact and terrible midnight when the clock's hands are joined, Emergency was given birth. New day, new dawn and alongwith new hope were drawn back into the darkest night. No doubt, it was a new day, new dawn and new hope but not for the whole country, but only for Mrs. Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi and their supporters.

2.2.1 Proclamation of Emergency :

“Parvati gave a final pitiable little yelp and out he popped, while all over India policemen were arresting people, all opposition leaders except members...” (499)

With the proclamation in hand, Mrs. Gandhi started spreading her tentacles tight around the neck of her opponents. She had to do it, she did want to survive at all cost. She had the namelist of the people whoever dared to say things against her. It was the fruit of the long surveillance by the police and intelligence. The police were ordered to arrest all the opponents according to the list. School teachers, Lawyers, Poets, Newspapermen every person other than leader who had ever tried to comment on the contemporary politics was a suspect. The intelligence was asked to follow or keep an eye on the suspected for 24 hours.

“...and when the three contortionist had washed the baby and wrapped it in an old Sari and brought it out for its father to see at exactly the same moment, the word Emergency was being heard for the first time.”

(499-500)

The baby Aadam Sinai is the metaphor for Emergency. The baby that was born is washed and wrapped in a old Sari. It means that Emergency was proclaimed. Soon after that Mrs. Gandhi called a cabinet meeting for which Sanjay Gandhi was present. The proclamation of Emergency was put before them for their information and not for discussion. And through radio broadcast, she declared Emergency. Emergency imposed ban on freedom of every sort the constitution of India has granted to the citizens of India. Precisely, it means the birth of new age, the age of dictatorship disguised in democracy, the age of darkness of the continuous midnight of 2 long years.

“Aadam Sinai arrived at a night shadowed slum on June 25th 1975. And the time ? The time matters too. As I said at night. No its important... on the stroke of midnight as a matter of fact. Clocks hands joined palms. Oh, spell it out, spell it out; at the precise instant of India’s arrival at Emergency, he emerged. There were gasps; and across the country silence and fears. And owing to the occult

tyrannies of the benighted hour, he was mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his country.”

(500)

Rushdie has often used birth images for linking history with autobiography. Saleem was the face or a metaphor of India while Aadam Sinai is the metaphor for Emergency. The child was dumped and so was the self-proclaimed National Emergency. It was a blind rule and was a reign of terror where “na dalil, na appeal, na vakil” was applicable. The whole nation was etherized by the Emergency it could see the things happening but was helpless even to move the limbs so as to oppose.

The narrative quality of Salman Rushdie’s novels is virgin. They are not merely filled with words but with feeling and the senses. No doubt, Emergency was something beyond words, its miseries were beyond expression. His sketch of helplessness of the nation reminds us of the helplessness of Coleridge’s Mariner and his crew. Though

the daily chores were going around the nation, something was missing. People were working together, yet were afraid to talk, because they never knew when it was their time to come. There was total unrest. The whole nation was turned out into a body without soul, day without sunshine and a night without dawn.

“Endless night, days, weeks months without the sun or rather a stream rinsed plate, a sun washing us in lunatic midnight light.”

(S04)

Saleem's son suffered from tuberculosis. The nation also suffered from the tuberculosis named Emergency. Parvati's effort to cure the child were the efforts of the 'Satyagrahis' who addressed the rallies against Emergency and Mrs. Gandhi and were daily arrested.

Saleem as a child of Independence was praised but was unaware that the life's path was not as smooth as it seemed to be. There are hurdle nodoubt, but their were also deep ditches covered with dry grass. And one of such deep ditches was Emergency. But the child Aadam Sinai exactly like his putative father was born at

midnight and entangled himself with another important phase of Indian history. He is strong, hard his immobile eye balls are the symbol of his resolution to be practical. Emergency Raj was strong and worked as a black magic spell over the nation. The imposers were strong and the entire power of authority as in there hands. They never cherished the idea that all the opponents will willingly surrender to them. They were practical and knew they had to hit the shot every now and then to keep themselves at position.

“he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I
when he sleeps, his eye balls are immobile
beneath their lids.”

(507)

Rushdie’s novel is a meditation on the textuality of history and particular of the official history that constitutes the Nation.

2.2.2 Turkman Gate and Family Planning :

Salman Rushdie has not only recorded the real history but has actually brought liveliness in his documentation of the historical events. The characters and atmosphere are portrayed not merely

picturesquely but with cinematic effect. The innocence and tyrannies make the blood boil, nerves strain. The pathetic picturisation of Turkan Gate incident symbolised by magicians ghetto next to Friday mosque shows the helplessness even of God in front of whimsical zeal of so called son of the nation. Life changes minute by minute but here lives were destroyed utterly. The usual morning with usual promises turns into the midnight forever.

“It must have been morning, although the gloom of the endless midnight hung over the ghetto like a fog... through the murky light of Emergency... in short everything seemed to be in order.”

(5-11)

No one could have ever predicted the extent of the Emergency. It reached its heights when they planned for the ‘Beautification of the City’ and slums which had become an eyesore for them. The demolition squads of DDA and DMC swept a wave of terror among the juggi-jhonpuri dweller. The scenes of distress and sorrow were witnessed everywhere in the city. Whether it may be the torturous sun

or heavy rains, it didn't melt the stone hearts of the officials. They not only bulldozed their dreams but also razored their futures. Turkman Gate was not the only one to get demolished, but definitely it was an example of exceeding brutality.

“Civic beautification programme... authorized operation of Sanjay youth central committee... prepare instantly for evacuation to new site... this slum is a public eye sore, can not longer be tolerated... all persons will follow orders without dissent.”

(511)

April 19th 1976 was one of the darkest days in the history of Delhi, it was filled with screams and cries for humanity and justice. When Sanjay Gandhi and Mr. Jagmohan planned for the brutal act of the demolition of the private houses in the Turkman Gate area, police and DDA were not alone to create panic, they were accompanied by the unit of family planning programmers at Dujand house. People without warning, were surrounded by the demolition squads, police were ready with their brutal force to tackle the opposition of residents. Sterilisation programmers were with their scissor to sterilise them.

Few minutes were given to them to collect their belongings and to evacuate. They even smashed the people who were not able to get out in time. People who managed to save themselves from machines could not save themselves from scissors.

“They are doing nasbandi... save your women and children !”

(512)

Their efforts to escape were similar to the efforts of a sheep to get saved from the butchers hand. The terror stricken people ran for life which later turned in riots. The police need a reason to shoot; first they used tear gas and then, their bullets to mummify the humanity. Many innocents were killed. Their only offence was that they tried to protest against evil and protect their roofs. Inquiries revealed that the firing at the unarmed and helpless people was more gruesome than the Jallianwalla Bagh firing. Never such grave tragedy had taken place in any part of the world. It was said that bulldozers and scissors were the aids of Emergency.

Rushdie in *Midnight's children* has used all his strength to

dramatise the ~~incidence~~. The pathetic condition of people and their tragically ruined futures created a sense of loss and helplessness in them. The whole operation took five hour and Rushdie reports.

“By the end of the day, the slum with clusters
in the shadow of the face of the earth.”

(514)

He also refers to the rehabilitation camp, ‘barbed-wire camp’, called kichripur, on the side of Jamuna River.

2.2.3 The Arrests of Opponents:

The jailing of opponents and their torture was another salient feature of the Emergency Raj. Rushdie has remarkably fused the fact into fiction. He calls the jail ‘Widow’s Hostel’; according to him, either thirty thousand or a quarter of a million persons certainly lost their freedom. The true condition of the prisoners of Emergency is reflected in Saleem’s words that he was detained in a tiny room without any furniture and that he had to share his food with cockroaches and ants.

Rushdie has fabricated vasectomies as the wide spread conspiracy to pulverize the opponents, to drain all the hopes and to make them important to retain the power. He observes,

“When four hundred and twenty suffered ectomies, an avenging Goddess ensured that certain ectomized parts were curried with onions and green chillies and fed to the pie dogs of Banaras.” (524)

2.2.4 The Period of Discipline :

Every coin has two sides, so has the Emergency. Rushdie portrays both the sides remarkably. In *Midnight's Children* he says that Mrs. Gandhi's parted hair symbolizes both the sides of the Emergency.

“But she had white hair on one side and black on the other the Emergency too, had a white part public, visible, documented a matter for historians and a black part which being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us.”

(502)

Emergency in India had one peculiar quality. Though many were put behind the bars, practically it was invisible. There was law, order and discipline all around, trains, buses and aeroplanes ran on time. Unexpected income tax raids brought corruption under control. Foreigners who visited India during the Raj and had read about Emergency, were surprised to see no sign of it. They expected something like Emergency in the history of Brussel. Instead they saw that every business was going on time and in disciplined order.

Conclusion :

Salman Rushdie is a staunch supporter of the 'Art for Life's Sake'. He thinks that the doctrine of a novel should deal with the contemporary human condition. He frankly admits the fact of being a political novelist and says,

"I am fairly political animal. I do not think that when you include political material in fiction, it creates special problem. I think a lot of what I have written to do with public affairs and I am interested in that."

(Rushdie ; Gentleman : 1984)

The reality of Emergency stated in the history books is far more bitter. With the help of the birth images Rushdie has linked autobiography with history. Saleem's putative son is born at the midnight when Mrs. Gandhi enforced the Emergency Rule in India. Parvati's labour of 13 days coincides with the 13 days of political farce in India, when Mrs. Gandhi was found guilty of malpractices during election of 1971, refused to resign and later proclaimed Emergency.

Saleem find the purpose for the existence of the midnight's children and attributes to them the purpose of saving their motherland during Emergency. But Mrs. Gandhi jails them and ectomises them. They were drained of all hopes and made them impotent. Whole nation was drained and made impotent. The pulverised midnight's children are the metaphors for the lost hope and strength of the nation.

In an Introduction to Traiq Ali's *An Indian Dynasty; The story of the Nehru Gandhi Family*, Rushdie describes how that family has set about self-mythification with a will. Mrs. Gandhi metaphorised herself as India. She and her son had a strong urge to

control the second largest populated country. The totalitarian desire to hold the nation made her to use unconventional ways to smash her opponents. These suppressed, smashed people who, also had sparks of rebel deep into the heart waited for the right time to come.

Nodoubt Rushdie with his remarkable genius had portrayed the distressed nation during the period of Emergency.
